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ABSTRACT

Standard assumptions and teaching strategies must be discarded when working with international students on the university level. The problems faced by international students are exacerbated by archaic curriculum designs for reading courses. Students have often been expected to negotiate literary masterworks after only three semesters in the language. They were expected to progress from a language novice used to intensive work and reading to a mature reader able to handle a vocabulary of 80,000 to 120,000 words. In order to curb attrition, a new curriculum was designed which attended to foreign student needs. Assessment was made of student cognitive styles and a personal system of instruction for listening and reading comprehension was designed. The latest strategies in second language reading were taught the foreign students in the course. No ability to read in the target language was presupposed. Rate-alteration technology was applied to the reading-listening curriculum in the textual phase of a modified directed reading approach. The result of this combination of methods was better reading fluency during a one-semester course. (Author/AMH)

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Reading in the Multi-Cultural Classroom: Literacy and Triliteracy

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Introduction

When one works with international students who are trying to learn to read in a third language which is being taught to them through their second language, standard assumptions and teaching strategies must be discarded. New ways to access reading and access meaning must be devised, organized, and taught to each student on a modified personalized basis. All cognitive abilities should be accessed to provide the broadest range of possibilities for successful comprehension. And, although there is still debate in psychological and psycholinguistic circles about the nature of reading, teachers must scan the literature, aprise themselves of the strategies researchers have identified as being the most productive for mature readers, and pass this information on to their students. Who, if they get this knowledge before they are assigned a graded text or even an unedited masterwork, and who, if their command of the language is good enough, will tend to negotiate the text successfully while demonstrating behaviors characteristic of a mature reader. These behaviors will be inherently motivating, especially for international students who will probably benefit most from a teaching approach which includes a prescription for listening to recordings while they read the assigned selections.

Too often we fall into the trap of assuming that all students are the same and that standard teaching approachs--with which we are most comfortable--work well for all students especially if the teacher performs competently. Until three years ago, BYU--Hawaii students, like the majority of students in mainland university foreign-language programs, were expected to confront and appreciate the literary masterworks of the target language in the standard introductory literature class. They were expected, after three semesters of intensive practice in speaking and writing, to experience some miraculous metamorphosis and be able and willing to contend with a vocabulary of 80,000 to 120,000 words in the course of reading an unedited masterwork (Schulz, 1981; Holley, 1973). In addition, other factors of greater length, abstract vocabulary, mature style and a more complex syntax reinforced the wave of attrition in the third-year introduction to literature.

The students' negative response to the course resulted in part from being bored by the all-too-familiar approach to reading literature: first an introduction to the author and the work by the teacher, then the assignment of a passage for study, a subsequent classroom discussion, and a test.

Another factor was the masterwork texts. They were in sharp contrast to the structurally graded texts on which the students had been spoon fed during the previous three semesters. The masterworks were full-length and not the carefully edited short stories, essays, or excerpts from longer masterworks whose length and vocabulary were within the reach of these third-language learners.

They were demonstrating problems reading the assignments. It was not uncommon for some ambitious Japanese students to spend an hour on one page of literary narrative painfully translating the passage word-by-word (cf.: McGuigan, 1979). Many of the less ambitious students abandoned their language study in favor of more psychologically rewarding experiences in other disciplines.

This reading problem wasn't limited solely to the approach. It also stemmed from the students' inability with the language. Not only were they unable to handle the grapheme-phoneme correspondences of the advanced reading materials, as is the problem with many mainland students (Schulz,1981), they were still experiencing difficulties in comprehending spoken, as well as written messages in the target language (cf.: Corder, 1971).

Linguistically speaking, we were asking them as readers to identify words and phrases on the basis of existing syntactic and semantic information, information which was available on the printed page and was supposed to have been in their minds (cf.: Fodor, Bever, and Garrett, 1974). However, their fluency and command of the language had not developed to the point where they could comprehend everything they read. They were frustrated and doomed to failure because they were unable to do what Beatie calls ". . . deduce the core meaning of a sentence without necessarily knowing the specific meaning of each word (1977: 411).

It became readily apparent that continuing a standard approach to foreign language reading for third-language learners would only perpetuate the attrition rate and would ignore the necessity for continued general training in the language as a whole. Solutions to the problems

involved were, therefore, sought in the literature on reading in a second language.

Review of Selected Literature

The literature review indicated that authors prescribe certain attitudes and approaches to reading which are applicable to an international classroom. Cates and Swaffar (1979), for example, reminds us that reading is a complex ability that involves higher-order cognitive processes, that can be taught as particular comprehension strategies very early on in their language-learning experiences; they also stress that we, the teachers, should consider fundamental changes in our selection and classroom treatment of written texts. Butler (1979), in talking about the Directed Reading Approach, contends that second-language teachers will find their jobs supplemented rather than supplanted by machines if we understand some realities about reading and have a systematic teaching approach. The four realities he lists are: 1) Reading is only one part of a larger language-learning process; 2) Reading in any language is a process of recording, decoding, and encoding information which leads to comprehension; 3) Reading skills may be transferrable from content to content, but comprehension may not be; and 4) because learners need feedback, teacher-student meetings are essential at several stages in the reading instruction process (1979: 12). Research by Mott (1977) in analyzing the reading of German and English by German speakers caused her to conclude that, whenever possible the instructor should know the reading proficiency of their students in their native language. Her studies, like those of Mark Clarke (1978), demonstrated that there seems to be a parallel relationship between reading strategies employed in the reader's

first language and the reading proficiency level achieved in the target language. Clark (1979) carried the question one step further in his research with adult ESL students reading in Spanish and English. He concluded that limited control over the second language "short circuits" the good reader's system, causing him to revert to "poor" reading behaviors.

Other second-language reader strategies were investigated by Phillips (1975). She, in talking of the reading strategies exhibited by college students, indicated that, in general, students approach reading as problem solving. She concluded that there are at least three subtasks which make up the problem-solving framework. They are: 1) categorizing words grammatically, 2) recognizing cognates, and 3) recognizing root words. She found also that students paid less critical attention to tense distinctions in a sentence. This says something for the primacy of syntax over morphology. While, linguistic research has identified other strategies which teachers might pass on to their students in the classroom. Goldman-Eisler (1969) has suggested, for example, the word length is a cue to the amount of information conveyed by a word. She found informativeness was directly related to word length, and that cognitive pauses in spontaneous speech were related to the unpredictability (informativeness) of the following word. Given these findings, Goldman-Eisler identified two pause systems operating in spontaneous speech--cognitively determined pauses and syntactically determined pauses. Wanat has also identified these same two pause systems in the visual pauses readers make when they attend to a printed message (1968, 1972, 1976A, 1976B). The broader linguistic-cognitive process of inferencing is an access to

the meaning of any message and is not limited to reading. Sticht and James (1977) have argued that when a new linguistic-cognitive competency is added through listening skills development, it automatically becomes accessible to the learner's reading activities. What this means is that since listening and reading comprehension tasks involve similar syntactic and semantic processes (Hausfeld, 1981), the learner's oral and aural language skills should be used to develop as many abilities in the new language as possible.

Personalized System of Reading Instruction

What seemed clear from the literature was that there were many things which could be done to meet the needs of third-language learners. The standard survey model was discarded in favor of a Directed Reading Approach. Also the idea of the standard developmental reading course with its modular approach was set aside in favor of a modified Personalized System of Instruction (PSI-Steiner, 1979) which emphasized both language skills development and reading skills mastery (Baudoin et al., 1977 ; Clarke and Silberstein, 1977; Eskey, 1973). Curriculum organization amounted to basically a four-phase program: 1) Pre-reading diagnosis; 2) Pre-textual exposure; 3) Textual confrontation; and 4) Post-reading evaluation.

Four-Phase Approach

The genesis of the program over three years has resulted in a particular curricular organization. The pre-reading diagnosis phase occurs only once at the beginning of the semester, covers the first two class periods, and is the organizational focal point from which the remainder

of the course is presented to each individual. During these two periods, three diagnostic tests are presented to the students as an entire group. They take a reading speed test, a cloze procedure, and they respond to a modified Hill Cognitive Preference Inventory which is used to map their cognitive styles. The speed test discriminates at the reading ability level. The cloze procedure tests the languaging level and confirms the speed-test score. The cognitive-styles mapping serves a two-fold purpose. It serves to confirm or disconfirm preconceived notions of the influence of culture on a person's approach to acquiring information through print media; it also serves as a motivator. Let me explain the actual order of events as they occur at the beginning of the semester.

The first class period is taken up by reading three passages in Spanish. One is for "warm up," the second is for a speed check, and the third is a more lengthy passage on which they are tested by responding to a cloze procedure (compare Figure 1). Based on the results of the speed test and the cloze procedure--which we employ as a grammar usage test--each student is tentatively assigned to one of three tracks according to his language abilities. If they are fast readers, but demonstrate marginal ability in grammar, they are assigned to the advanced-intermediate group. If the test score shows deficiencies in both reading and grammar, they go to the intermediate group. The fluent language speakers are assigned to the advanced group.

It goes without saying that student learning styles must be attended to in a personalized program of instruction. During the third class period, students respond to our version of the Hill Cognitive Preference Inventory. To avoid simply stratifying the students according to ethnic

type or nationality, we measure student cognitive styles. We modified the original scales to make them as culturally neutral as possible. We knew that some of our students, for example, had never experienced the smell of a new car in their lives, and to ask them to use that as a referent is totally irrelevant. In addition, we are aware that some cultures, because of rigid socialization processes, tend to demonstrate different ego and psychological control structures which differ from those demonstrated by other cultures in identifiable patterns (Goldberg, 1977; Witkin, et al., 1962). Some Polynesians, for example, tend to be more field dependent and more impulsive in their learning styles than many Asians, who tend to be more field independent and reflective in theirs (Harvey, 1981).

Students from some cultures prefer to learn where aural stimuli predominate. A benefit which accrues from such knowledge is the ability to prescribe a tape-assisted approach which emphasizes the fact that comprehension skills acquired in listening are automatically accessible to the learner in his reading comprehension activities (Sticht and James, 1977). The second benefit for using a cognitive-styles mapping approach is a psychological advantage. The students are flattered by the personal interest you show in them by mapping their personal cognitive styles and by the interpretation session which follows; their motivation quotient rises astronomically and their reading performance remains high.

The student then enters into one of the three tracks of a modified PSI format. Because of the valuable interaction in class learning sessions, each group meets once a week for lectures on reading and training in reading skills. On off days, they go to a testing center (the ins-

tructor's office) and take a test on the reading assignment which, if it is not passed, may be retaken twice with appropriate individual counseling after any failure. This is to say that the PSI hallmark of self-pacing is replaced by a structured course which includes most other PSI principles.

Pre-Textual Phase

The second phase of a Directed Reading Approach (DRA) must be the pre-textual phase for all three levels. DRA's range along a continuum from high-moderate-low teacher involvement. In order to meet the needs of our multi-national students, the pedagogical decision was made to involve the instructor as much as possible during the one class period per week where the pre-textual experience was to take place. DRA's, by the way, are usually divided into three stages: pre-textual, textual, and postreading. This is not to suggest that reading itself is composed of only three stages. These divisions are for curriculum management and represent teaching stages during which the instructor can perform his dialogic function (Butler, 1979: 13).

The pre-textual stage consists of a fairly standard DRA approach outlined by Cooke (1977). She suggests at least four steps should be included: 1) determine the concept(s) which the student is to learn from the reading; 2) establish the background by appealing to the prior knowledge possessed by each student; 3) teach selected key vocabulary words which tend to identify the concept(s); and 4) develop an intent for purposeful reading by exposing students to three different kinds or levels of questions before the reader negotiates the reading. The three levels are: I) literal; II) interpretive; and III) associational or

applied (Cooke, 1977: 12). At the first level, the student may skim and scan the material with a pre-conceived focus for reading and quickly find answers to the "who, what, where, and when" questions. However, as Been suggests,. the higher-order questions of levels II and III encourage students to use inferential reasoning and evaluative judgments which as they focus on global meaning rather than on detail, foster reading for meaning (1975:237). The different kinds of "higher-order" questions can best be illustrated by using the sentence: "Mrs. Han-Hsiao Min flies to Hawaii twice a year to buy fashionable clothes," and then producing either true-false/yes-no, or multiple-choice questions. For example,

Inferential: Does Mrs. Han have a lot of money?

Evaluative : Mrs. Han is interested in: clothes/flying/ traveling (Been, 1975: 237).

Giving the reader these kinds of questions in advance will reduce ineffectual exploration and speed up learning.

There are other activities which should be included in the pre-textual phase. For example, a student should be directed toward reading-process objectives, methods of attacking the reading material. Aside from requesting that the student overview, or skim, supplemental markers, subheads, captions, pictures, illustrations, graphs, etc., before he reads, the teacher should suggest the type of reading to be done and a timed rate to be met. Types of reading range from scanning, or rapid identification of predetermined facts, to study reading where a majority of the ideas in a selection are read or considered carefully. It should be noted that to become efficient readers, students do not need to read every word in a selection. Further, they should be able to adapt their reading techniques

and rate to the material and the purpose, reading more or less and faster or slower according to their needs. These two points, though obvious to seasoned readers, are frequently overlooked by grade-conscious students generally, and more frequently overlooked by linguistically naive second-language readers (Butler, 1979: 14).

Another technique which greatly benefits students is to use a cloze passage as a teaching tool. Cloze passages are presented to each level during group meetings. Each cloze test is based on the actual materials to be read and on a deletion rate of every-seventh word and modified by the provision of answers and distractors in a multiple-choice format (Porter, 1975). For use in group teaching, dyad/triad work--with the stipulation that student interaction must be in the target language--whatever the cultural difference between students, the ability and challenge of the students' choosing items to complete a cloze deletion and discussing as best they can and "arguing" over their choices in the target language is both self-teaching and important as a means of promoting uninhibited languaging practice in a reading class--as well as a means by which the instructor can monitor individuals and take a break.

Textual Phase

The second, or textual, phase of a DRA for international students differs from the standard DRA "reading" phase. The careful pre-textual preparation helps to set the agenda for the student's attempt to negotiate the reading material himself. This is common to both the standard approach and our modified approach. The difference lies in the stress on listening and aural support materials which have been designed into the program. For every reading selection to be assigned, a recording is made.

Whenever available, native informants read the selections in a studio situation where extraneous noise can be controlled. Other recordings are made under less favorable conditions by the instructor. After a series of passages are recorded, they are submitted to rate alteration and re-recorded onto another cassette tape at three different rates: slower-than-normal, normal and compressed. If we take 165 words per minute (w.p.m.) as the average "normal" native delivery speed, then the slower-than-normal speed might be either one of 135 w.p.m. or one of 115 w.p.m. The compressed or speeded-up velocity would be at 250 w.p.m. There are technical reasons for the specificity of the velocity.

What we do to generate the second and final taped version of the reading selection is to re-record through a machine called a speech compressor-expander. It's a variable-speed tape recorder with a special electronics package which dates from the early 1950's. In 1953, Garvey (1953: 296-306) reported on his experiments of speech compression. He cut recorded speech tapes into segments, discarded interspersed segments and rejoined the remaining ones together. The result was a tape that sounded faster than the original but preserved most of the original voice quality. A year later, Fairbanks, Everitt and Jaeger (1954) made public an ingeneous electromechanical instrument which both compressed and expanded the speech signal before playout. The Fairbanks system suffered from mechanical failures and was impractical for mass production.

With the advance of electronics and semiconductor circuits, it is now possible to own a regular-sized cassette player equipped with electronic circuitry which does the job of Fairbanks' machine--it samples speech at any selected velocity with greater reliability and, in the case

of compression, discards tiny segments of the speech signal, or for expansion, repeats segments of the message while maintaining a flat frequency response. What this means to the classroom language teacher is that we can meet the needs of students by varying recorder playout speed without having to worry about the speaker sounding like Lurch from the television program, "The Adams Family," or sounding like one of Walt Disney's chipmunks. The overall scheme of compression or expansion is called rate-alteration technology.

The S2LSRQ System

Because of a research-based belief in the high degree of shared variance between listening comprehension and reading comprehension (Clarke, 1981; Sticht and James, 1977; Clarke and Silberstein, 1977), rate-altered tapes are integral parts of an international student's out-of-class reading experience. However, before we send them to the language laboratory to "listen to the tape" and "read the story on pages 22-33," specific instructions are given regarding the kind of reading behavior they might be expected to use to negotiate the assignment. We suggest that each student attack a passage purposefully using a series of strategies to answer the different levels of questions they have received in the pre-textual phase. In addition to receiving questions to answer, they are introduced to the S2LSRQ system--Skim, Listen, Scan, Read, and Question. They also go armed with an understanding of the four strategies developed by Clarke and Silberstein (1977: 143-44) and given further depth and clarity by Pierce (1975: 255): 1) Skimming; 2) Scanning; 3) Reading for Comprehension; and 4) Critical Reading. Depending on the narrative and rhetorical structure of the reading selection, students will skim titles,

picture captions, paragraph headings and subheadings to get the general drift of the passage, then they are encouraged to listen to the passage twice, first at an expanded rate (less than normal), and then listen and scan the visual material for answers to the lower-level questions. This is done at a listening speed which matches their reading skills and comprehension ability. They are then instructed to re-read the passage with the tape machine turned off. The questioning or evaluative phase comes at a time when the students have been able to answer all the questions given them in the pre-textual phase. They come to the instructor's office and take a modified cloze procedure (Porter, 1975). The latter proficiency-diagnosis phase may be repeated at least twice if the student does not demonstrate at least a 70% pass rate the first time the test is taken.

Results

The S2LSRQ system is flexible and has filled the needs of students from a variety of cultures who demonstrated a variety of reading abilities. In the debrief portion of the post-reading phase we discovered the following:

> A. Fluent speakers of the target language (L2/L3), who are fluent readers in their native tongue (L1) and who are basically field independent in their cognitive style, transfer their L1 reading skills to the L2/L3 and find that the faster-than-normal compression rate only slows them down. They prefer their own approach to the S2LSRQ system.
>
> B. Some fluent speakers of the L3 who are Samoan prefer to use th tapes but modify the system to S3LSRQ; they prefer to listen to all three velocities before they feel confident enough to be tested.

C. Some intermediate-level speakers of the L3 who are Polynesian prefer to listen and read simultaneously the assigned selections.

D. Some intermediate-level speakers of the L3 who are Asian find it necessary only to follow exactly the S2LSRQ system.

E. Some lower-level Caucasians who demonstrate marginal L2 fluency but are good readers in their L1, used all three rates in tandem and follow an S3LSRQ approach.

F. A bilingual Salvadoran (who lived most of her life in Oregon State with immigrant parents) who is verbally fluent in the target language and English, her school language, but shows poor-reader strategies to the target language. She used the tapes consistently at the expanded rate as she read the reading selections.

From these post-reading debrief summaries, one can intuitively conclude several things. First, that verbal ability influences reading ability. Second, that culture influences reading behavior and strategies--that persons with a strong aural tradition can develop better "good reader" strategies if they transfer strategies from listening. Third, Clarke's "short circuit" hypothesis (1978B) about efficient L1 readers learning an L2 applies to L2 learners reading in an L3. Apparently the L2 speakers limited control over the L3 "short circuits" their good reading behavior in the L2.

Summary

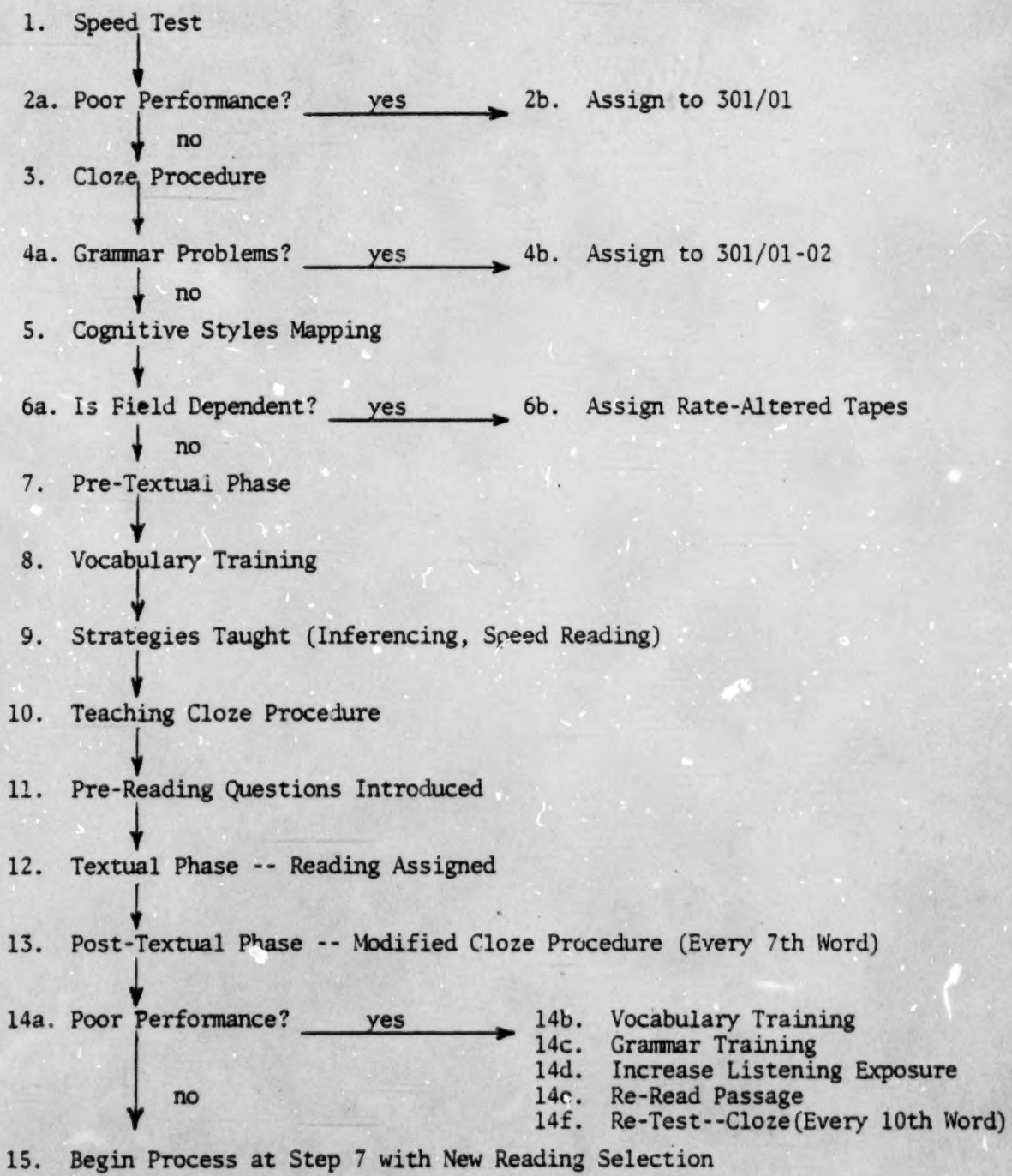
At B.Y.U.--Hawaii Campus we do not presuppose any innate ability to read in the target language. Rather than the traditional introductory course in literature, we have organized a curriculum to help students continue general training in achieving language proficiency and specific training in reading comprehension.

Theoretically, we adhere to the reading universals hypothesis and the view that reading is a psycholinguistic process. However, we stress a taxonomy of decreasing exactness according to the linguistic maturity, i.e., the student's proficiency in the target language. For the less-proficient speaker, we prescribe interaction with graded readers, pre-reading materials, rate-altered recordings of assigned passages presented at different velocities, and exercises based on the cloze procedure for grammar awareness training and reading speed in the L3. Awareness of using phonemic, morphemic, syntactic, semantic, and discourse cues of the language comes only after the students have an understanding of the process which one uses to communicate. The proficient speakers/readers are introduced to these factors through exposure to exercises based on advanced graded materials which are rapidly phased out in favor of non-graded texts.

The course is managed by grouping according to L2 or L3 ability and individualized according to vocabulary ability. For the proficient L2 reader who is learning a third language, we employ graded texts, rate-alteration technology and a directed reading approach which includes the S2LSRQ system but decrease the requirement for exactness, reduce the learner's fear of local errors and increase awareness of clues and cues available from the text in addition to increasing the frequency of exposure to non-graded target-language materials. For the proficient L1 and/or L2 reading ability, the multi-skills approach--aural and visual--was adopted because of the dominance among the students of the auditory mode as a means of assimilating knowledge. We stress acquisition of comprehension ability through exercises which teach making predictions and

inferences, identifying main ideas, constructing an orientational framework, answering "high-order" questions, recognizing English (L2) cognates with the L3 lexis, and using grammar as an additional aid to comprehension. Texts are fitted to the task and vice versa, and the more difficult ones are assigned to the more advanced L2 or L3 speakers. We believe that a course in which the student is taught productive reading strategies better prepares him to think in the language and is a necessity before the student is "thrown" to the proverbial "lions" of the target language masterworks.

Figure 2.



International Student Directed Reading Approach (ISDRA)

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